

# What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the act of being present and being intentional with our attention. When we are mindful we notice what is happening in and around us, so that we can learn to accept and manage our experience, instead of allowing our thoughts or emotions to run the show.

Scientists have found that when you live in the moment — that is, get ‘out of your head’ and focus on your surroundings instead of being wrapped up in your thoughts — you will usually feel happier and feel less stress. With enough practice, you will also learn to better manage your thoughts and feelings, so that you are in control of them rather than them being in control of you!

## Mindfulness Skills

Practicing these mindfulness skills can help us remain in the moment and more effectively notice, acknowledge, and accept our emotions and the situations around us.

## Do One Thing at a Time

When you are eating, **eat**. When you are walking, **walk**. When you are dancing, **dance**. When you are worrying, **worry**.

During each of these practices, notice the desire to be somewhere else, to go somewhere else in your mind, to do something else, to multitask — and then come back to doing one thing at a time. Some helpful skills for practicing doing one thing at a time:

### Observe:

- Observe both inside and outside of yourself: what sensations do you notice in your body? (Use the five senses mindfulness exercise for guidance.) What are you feeling? Do you notice any urges to do a certain thing? What is going on around you?

### Describe:

- Put words to an experience working to focus on objective facts: describe “who, what, when, and where.”
- Put words to your thoughts and interpretations and label them as thoughts and interpretations. For example, note to yourself “My brain is telling me that I am not very good at mindfulness” or “I’m having the thought that this is too hard for me.” Try to notice whether your thoughts are helpful or harmful.

## Fully Participate in What You're Doing

Join in without holding back. Notice thoughts/feelings that may be distracting from the situation and throw yourself completely into the experience.

## Practice Being Non-Judgmental

Notice yourself, others, and the experience itself and try not to evaluate as good or bad; just acknowledge the facts. If you find yourself judging (yourself, another or the experience), notice and acknowledge your judgment and re-focus on the observing the facts of the current experience.

## Practice Being Kind and Compassionate Toward Yourself

If you find yourself judging yourself harshly or unkindly, turn your mind towards self-acceptance and self-kindness. You can use the following resources to practice self-kindness:

- [Read a script here](#)
- [Watch a guided meditation here](#)
- [Listen to a guided meditation here](#)

## Using Mindfulness with Other Skills

Mindfulness is a key part of all other skills learned in CBT.

### **Relaxation and Distress Tolerance:**

Mindfulness allows us to notice, acknowledge and accept strong feelings and experiences more effectively, and can help us focus our attention during relaxation and distress tolerance exercises.

**Cognitive Coping:** To begin challenging anxious and/or depressive thoughts, we need to use mindfulness skills to notice (observe) and put words to (describe) our anxious/depressive thinking. We can't change our thoughts if we don't notice when they're happening!

### **Behavioral Activation:**

We can use mindfulness to be more engaged with pleasant and active events.

**Exposure:** To effectively retrain our brain about what is dangerous, we have to be really present during exposures and focused on the anxiety. If we aren't mindful (i.e. if we distract ourselves, let our minds wander, etc.) exposures are not as effective.